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SUBJECT: GEORGIA PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION UPDATE MAY 20

REF: TBILISI 765

11. (SBU) Summary: As the election campaign entered its last week, ODIHR released its Second Interim Report on May 15. The report highlights active GOG election preparations, an extended deadline to check voter lists, increased campaign activity by opposition parties, and the broadly-equal TV coverage by the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB). It also notes lack of evidential review during complaint hearings and increased incidents of intimidation in the regions. USAID-funded IFES discovered some of its PEC trainings were not being attended by opposition-appointed PEC members or party observers, and the Embassy intervened with both the GOG and the opposition to fix the situation. On May 13, President Saakashvili said the role of opposition in Parliament and government should be increased after the elections. On May 9, the MOIA issued a statement echoing the Public Defender's call that all cases of intimidation should be investigated. In a bid to improve the election's transparency, IFES and the CEC procured 800 more faxes with which to send preliminary results directly to the CEC, 540 of which do not require landlines. An anti-government NGO released its poll results this week. Though its results differ from those of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (septel), the survey's methodology is unclear. End Summary.

ODIHR Take Two, The Good and the Bad  
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12. (U) ODIHR released its Second Interim Report on May 15 (emailed to EUR/CARC). On the positive side, ODIHR noted that nearly all parties have begun campaigning in earnest. The Central Election Commission (CEC) is very active, having extended the deadline for parties to correct the voters' list, have held trainings around the country on schedule, been very open with their sessions, registered numerous more international and domestic observers, and maintained a much improved public awareness campaign. President Saakashvili and MOIA Vano Merabishvili each recently issued strong statements against any malfeasance or interference in the election process. Saakashvili demanded a National Movement (UNM) majoritarian candidate in Tsageri remove himself from the race after threatening government employees if he did not receive 80 percent. The report also stated that the Georgian Public Broadcaster has been broadly equitable to all parties in the campaign, with both airtime and news coverage. They have provided each party 7 free slots of 90 seconds each, which may be unprecedented, according to political consultant Jeremy Rosner.

13. (SBU) On the less positive side, ODIHR noted that the opposition has threatened violence and is using extreme language, which is damaging the campaign environment and threatening the election administration. The report mentions an increase in threats of intimidation by officials, primarily in the regions. The report states that the ruling UNM continues to receive more -- and more positive --

coverage on all major TV stations, except the Georgian Public Broadcaster (and the small, opposition-oriented Kavkasia). Finally, the report notes that most appeals filed with the election commissions or courts have been decided in the UNM's favor, with no review of evidence or testimony of witnesses. (Note: The dismissal of complaints and appeals without proper review was a problem noted in ODIHR's final report after the presidential election. ODIHR privately told Poloff that allegations of intimidation are still much fewer than during the Presidential election. End note.)

#### PEC Members Miss Trainings in Kvemo Kartli

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14. (SBU) USAID-funded IFES -- formerly the International Foundation for Election Systems -- has provided the training plan, materials and personnel (in conjunction with UNDP) to train nearly 51,000 election commissioners for the May 21 elections. On May 14, an IFES training coordinator discovered some of its PEC trainings were not being attended by opposition-appointed PEC members in Marneuli and Dmanisi districts in the Kvemo Kartli region (both districts saw unusually high turnout in January). IFES contacted the CEC, who called the DEC Chairman. IFES then traveled to meet the Marneuli DEC Chairman. IFES reported that the DEC Chairman (a powerful local figure) claimed that he was unaware exactly why the opposition members were not attending the PEC trainings. The Embassy raised the issue with Giga Bokeria and opposition leaders, and encouraged the Republican and Conservative parties to ensure their PEC members and observers attended training on May 17 and 20. The Republican party told Poloff on May 16 that they had experienced

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significant problems in Marneuli district, with many PECs not even having been opened yet. They said the DEC had never informed their PEC members about the training.

#### Saakashvili and MOIA Make Statements

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15. (U) On May 13, President Saakashvili addressed a group of university students in Tbilisi. He said the opposition's role in Parliament and government should be increased after the elections. Saakashvili said that currently the opposition has no feeling of responsibility or involvement in the government, and consequently does not share its successes either. Such a condition is a weakness, said Saakashvili, which should be discussed openly in the next Parliament. Most opposition parties dismissed Saakashvili's statement out of hand, saying it could not be trusted. The Republicans and Christian-Democratic Movement were slightly more nuanced, noting that coalition governments are common in Europe, but such talk would have to wait until after the elections.

16. (U) On May 9, the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued a statement echoing the Public Defender's call that all cases of intimidation should be investigated and those guilty punished. This was in response to the Public Defender noting a rise in accusations of intimidation. The MOIA agreed that free and fair elections are the common goal and responsibility of all government agencies. The statement said the MOIA will protect all witnesses and victims' rights, and that any government agency with information regarding such intimidation or crimes, including the Public Defender, should share that information with the relevant law enforcement authorities.

#### Just the Fax(es)...

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17. (SBU) IFES provided logistical and technical support, which allowed the CEC to acquire approximately 800 more faxes for this election (USAID-funded IFES bought 1,000 landline faxes for the January election). The CEC bought the

lion's share of the new machines, 540 of which do not require landlines. The faxes will allow even remote PECs to send their preliminary results directly to the CEC, where they will then be immediately posted on the CEC's website. IFES conducted a feasibility study earlier, and is now distributing and setting up the machines, in preparation to test the system on May 17. The use of the faxes is seen as a key component of ensuring greater transparency in this election.

#### NGO Releases Survey Results

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18. (SBU) On May 14, the anti-government coalition of NGOs, For Fair Elections, released the results of their nationwide survey. They claimed they polled 300 Tbilisians and 825 people from 10 regions throughout Georgia. The group claimed that 87.2% of respondents would vote, 6.1% would not vote, and 6.7% were undecided. Apparently, these numbers are taken from those who agreed to participate, as 25% of those polled refused to answer any questions. The Nationwide results were reported as:

- Joint Opposition 34%
- UNM 31.6%
- Christian-Democratic Movement 11.8%
- Labor 9.3%
- Republicans 7.6%

(Comment: The NGO did not explain their methodology in greater detail. The results are inconsistent with the UNM's political consultant Rosner's recent polls, reported septel, which show the UNM with a consistent lead among likely voters. End comment.

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